

FCCS Sept 15, 2019
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“Lost and Found”

You all recall the process used for calling a new pastor, right? A search committee is established, they narrow it down to a couple of candidates and eventually just one is chosen. There was a woman on the search committee of the congregation I served prior to coming to you that stands out in my mind. In the final process of the interviews she looked me straight in the eyes and said- “I want you to be our pastor on one condition, that you never, ever preach on the passage that refers to Jesus’ followers as sheep.”

Today’s passage from Luke proffers the offending description, but it isn’t the only one so treachery was everywhere. Sheep were a big deal to the early followers of Jesus, so of course they showed up in the parables. Also, there is some really cool stuff to know about sheep, like they imprint to shepherd’s voice. Ten shepherds can be calling, but only the sheep that belong to that shepherd will respond to his voice. A pretty sweet parallel to the relationship between God and God’s people.

But it is the coin that get’s me every time. I lose money often. I put a \$20 in my pocket and it goes through the wash, where is that \$20, I know I had it, where could it have gone? It’s like glasses and keys, and I swear to highest heaven, every time I find one of those lost objects- or more accurately Katie finds one of those objects for me- you can bet there is rejoicing. I don’t exactly run to my neighbors with my happy dance, but I have a happy dance (seeing it’ll cost ya extra).

Now, I can’t explain why, but while I was watching this week’s Democratic debates something dawned on me. I think it was brought on by the Hebrew Scriptures reference made by Corey Booker, “Without a vision, the people will perish.”

It was either that passage from Habakkuk or Seth Godin’s blog post this week about limitations, not external limitations, but the internal ones that prevent us from reaching the fullness of our capacity:

“It’s almost always the limits of our internal narrative. Our guts. Our willingness to be kind, to believe, to care enough to leap.

We can't do anything about the limitations of physics, and we can never do enough to change the limitations of our culture. But we can begin today on changing the internal limits we place on ourselves."

Somewhere in the mix, I thought, maybe it is not the external version of the sheep or the coin that Jesus is refereeing to, what if it is the pieces inside? Maybe this passage is about coming home to oneself, about recovering the lost treasures of our own vision.

I wonder if that is something with which we could resonate this morning?

Do you ever look at your life and wonder what happened to certain elements of your vision for who you wanted to be in the world?

As people educated in Christian doctrine, we do not love the term "sinners" that shows up in this passage. It has been too often used against us and people we love to be a useful term, but in Luke's world it was cut and dry-some people so habitually transgressed the ways of God that Luke felt they were sinners in need of repentance. Our job is to take this passage on its own terms: Jesus distinguishes between sinners who repent and "the righteous who have no need of repentance" (15:7). The point is that Jesus rejects no one, those whom society would write off as beyond redemption, Jesus welcomed and offered potential for deeper more courageous living.

I won't speak for you, but personally, I can always use an invitation to embrace deeper and more courageous living.

The invitation this morning is to search the interior of your soul's living room; is there a coin or a sheep that have gotten lost in there?

Is there a something or a someone you had hoped to become one day?

Might today be that day?

I want to invite you to take a moment to think about your lost sheep or coin, to identify it and write it down.

A couple of years ago I had people mail a note to themselves with their new years goal on it- today I am issuing a similar invitation; write the lost piece

of yourself on a note to yourself- just as a reminder and perhaps offer yourself a word of encouragement as a good shepherd might.

Remember the passage this morning also says that there is “joy in the presence of the angels of God” when what has been lost has been recovered.

Once you have written it down, because there is power in naming it- I wonder if you might turn to the person next to you and share with them what it is that you wrote down. These are loving people and this is a safe place to grow into who you mean to be. So, let us witness each other into more courageous and deeper living. We do that by sharing our hearts-paces with each other. When you are ready you can share with each other and I will call you back in a few minutes.

Brene Brown reminds us that it is those who have a strong sense of love and belonging that have the courage to be imperfect. To heck with perfection, that is God’s business, but we have just this one precious and wild life. Let us try, and try, and try again to live out of our greatest visions and deepest hopes. If the internal limits we have paced on ourselves have inhibited us in any way, don’t you think it is time to find a new way?

If not us, who? If not now, when?

There was one more quote from the debate on Thursday that stood out- it referenced an ancient African Parable;
If you want to go fast, go alone.
If you want to go far, go together.

Let us be for and with each other celebrating as the angels do- that which once was lost and is now FOUND.
Amen